Humanism

& the British Humanist Association



Professor A. J. Ayer, second President of the BHA (Sir Julian Huxley was the first).

This leaflet tells you about the work of the humanist movement in this country and something of the thought behind it. **Contents include:** The humanist point of view/*page 2*; Why join an organisation?/*page 4*; Humanism in action—the BHA/*page 6*; the BHA Advisory Council/*inside back cover.*

Humanists think

That this world is all we have, and can provide all we need

That we should try to live full and happy lives ourselves and, as part of this, help to make it easier for other people to do the same

That all situations and people deserve to be judged on their merits by standards of reason and humanity

That individuality and social co-operation are equally important





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The H symbol of the BHA was named the 'happy man' by the the press when it was created in 1965. It is now being used all over the world as the sign of Humanism.

Lord Francis-Williams, author, broadcaster and journalist, is Vice-Chairman of the Humanist Broadcasting Council. **Brigid Brophy,** author and broadcaster, is a member of the Advisory Council of the BHA and wrote a Fabian pamphlet on religious education in schools. **Lord Willis,** stage and television playwright, is President of the Humanist Housing Association. **Margaret Knight,** psychology lecturer, broke new ground in 1955 when her Home Service talks on morals without religion aroused nation-wide controversy. *A full list of the BHA Advisory Council appears inside the back cover.*

The work of the BHA includes

Political pressure for social reform

Encouraging informed public debate on social questions

Setting up specialist bodies for study and pressure, eg in Education, Health, Broadcasting

Social action, eg housing the elderly, counselling, adoption

Courses and conferences

Magazine for members, and other publications

Overseas projects, eg rural development in India, education in Botswana



is as immediate, or as scholarly, as you like to make it. If this short account doesn't go deep enough for you, write for one of the books suggested at the end.

We do not believe that there is any 'ultimate purpose' to life, nor think that there is any point in looking for one. Human life has as much purpose as individual human beings give to their lives. We are as appreciative and aware as anybody of the beauties of the physical world and of the mysteries of the universe but, ultimately, we believe only what our reason and reasonable feelings tell us. For example, we find the idea of life after death a monumental piece of wishful thinking. We do not believe in God — though Humanism is more than simple agnosticism or atheism.

We accept nothing as revealed truth, not the ten commandments nor the theories of Marx or Freud. We prefer to be always curious, always questioning, and to make up our own minds. We accept the provisional, progressive, scientific picture of man and the universe, but fill in this outline with history and literature and the arts: values are as important to us as facts. We value flexibility of approach, especially where moral attitudes are concerned, for these are constantly changing and demand constant re-examination. Two hundred years ago, people burnt witches with the best social conscience imaginable.

As a rule of thumb to live by, we believe that those actions which lead to human happiness are good, and those which lead to unhappiness are bad. The aim is to do to others as we would be done by. Perfection is not something humanists expect. In all human beings there are both good impulses and bad ones, and we have to live with this state of affairs as best we can. The good ones, such as bravery, unselfishness and love, are evident and indestructible and can be encouraged. The bad ones, such as exploitation, cruelty and greed, must be minimised by education and checked by the laws and institutions devised by society to prevent chaos.

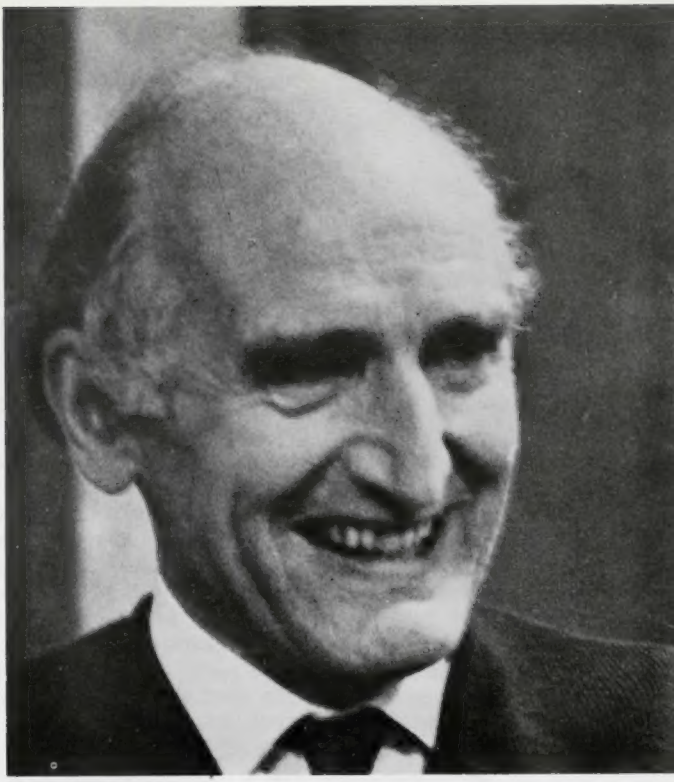
No man is an island. The humanist thinks that people with adult minds should be as free as possible to choose what to make of their lives, but there is no right to injure other individuals or the community in the process. Groups of individuals—christians, communists, flat-earthers—also have this right to be as free as possible, and to convert each other to their respective points of view. But neither a few individuals nor a few groups can be allowed to take over the community, as some religious and political bodies have done and in some places still do. Society must be organised for the benefit of all: a group is free to persuade, but not to impose. That is why humanists so strongly oppose laws based on the unwarranted assumption that 'Britain is a Christian country'. This 'open society' must aim at promoting, in a common-sense way, freedom and happiness for as many people as possible without favouring any particular group.

If you want a more exhaustive account of Humanism, write for a book list to the BHA, or read one of the following books (obtainable from your bookseller or library, or post free from the BHA.)

Humanism by H. J. Blackham (a Pelican Original, published March 1968, 5/-)

The Humanist Revolution by Hector Hawton (Barrie and Rockliff 10/6)

You can join the BHA as either a Member or an Associate. Both pay the same subscription and receive the same literature.
Associateship is for those under 21—who cannot be Members for legal reasons—and for those who feel unable to commit themselves outright to humanist principles. Associates may not vote at General Meetings.
Members have to agree to certain legal formalities. These are: to support the Objects of the BHA (a legalised expression of the principles underlying this leaflet); to agree to be bound by its Memorandum and Articles of Association (i.e. to abide by its rules governing the conduct of meetings, etc.); and to accept a liability of no more than 5/- for the Association's debts in the unlikely event of its collapse.



Why join an organisation?

To get things done. To get things studied. To get people helped. To get people woken up. To discuss your ideas and hear other people's. To make sure that there is a national body to counter the activities of un-humanists, and preserve that individuality which you value so highly.

If you are a humanist, you should help us to stand up for humanist ideas in international, national and local life. Frankly, I think that this is more of a responsibility than a choice. Deciding whether to join the BHA is not like wondering whether to join a tennis club: it is a question of whether you have enough confidence in your own beliefs to help others to fight for them.

It costs less than 10d a week to be a member of the BHA. Weigh that 10d against the next victory for the Catholic lobby in Parliament, the next injustice against an agnostic that goes unanswered, the next unsupported humanist in trouble—not to speak of general apathy in the face of the world's immense problems. If you genuinely cannot afford the subscription—and

H. J. Blackham, writer and philosopher, was the first director of the BHA and the first secretary of the international humanist movement

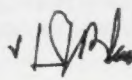
reductions are available for full-time students and those aged 65 or over—you need not worry that you will be excluded from the BHA by lack of means, for you can make a special application which will be sympathetically considered.

On the other hand, if you are well off and want to benefit the BHA, there is the Humanist Trust, recognised as an educational charity, to which you can make a covenanted donation (which adds the tax to the value of your gift).

If you are not yet quite certain whether you can fully support humanist principles, you can become an Associate of the BHA without committing yourself to support our objects.

The BHA is small and hard-up, but member for member and pound for pound it is willing to stand comparison with any similar body or any church as far as work is concerned. Distinguished members of its Advisory Council endorse its activities.

I hope you will do the same,



Humanism in action – the BHA

The BHA is a young, fully democratic organisation, formed in 1963 on the basis of an older movement. It inherits an historical tradition older than Christianity, and has links with other humanists all over the world via the International Humanist and Ethical Union. The BHA has several thousand individual members, many of whom also join one of the local groups in towns and districts throughout the country. It is closely linked with the Student Humanist Federation, which organises groups of young humanists, particularly in colleges.

People from every race and from every walk of life are welcome in the BHA.

As a member or associate of the BHA, you receive its news magazine *Humanist News* ten times a year. You are entitled to worthwhile price reductions at annual conferences, and special courses, publications and services are arranged primarily for you.

But though what you get is value for money, most people join the BHA for what they can give. Many members take an active part in running projects or local groups, or making people around them aware of Humanism and its work. By simply being a member you are helping all the work of the BHA financially, but many members who can afford it regard the £2 annual subscription as a minimum, knowing that they get a substantial return in the form of literature and services while helping to boost Humanism and its work with funds for publicity, advertising and organisation.

The annual budget of the BHA is a few thousand pounds, which compares with tens of millions of pounds for the churches. This is what we do with it:

Subscription to the BHA is £2 a year, or a minimum of £20 for life membership. A reduction to 25/- a year is available to full-time students and old-age pensioners. **The BHA address** is 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 (telephone 01-937 2341).

Humanists in politics

There is a whole range of social questions affecting the quality of human relationships and community life which are too often ignored by central and local government because they are inconvenient and lacking in organised support. They vary from remedying anomalies in the welfare services to recognising the nation's international obligations as a wealthy, industrialised power and a member of the UN; from the improvement of the physical environment of our towns and countryside to the reform of outdated laws based on the religious and moral attitudes of the past.

The BHA has a democratic system of deciding policy on such questions via the members, local groups, Executive Committee and the Annual General Meeting. Humanist Lobby is the political division of the Association, and works for the implementation of BHA policy. And the BHA is a sponsor of the Humanist Parliamentary Group of MPs and Lords willing to speak up for Humanism.

New members specially interested in political activity and willing to help should ask to be put on a special mailing list by returning the form on page 14. N.B. The BHA is not affiliated to any Parliamentary political party, nor does it intend to become a political party itself, but it encourages its members to take an active interest in politics.

Making them think

Before you can change laws or customs, you have to make it clear that there is a need for the change. Many people are quite happy to muddle along, especially if they are not personally involved with the subject under discussion. Others will not have thought deeply enough, failed to overcome prejudices, or simply been so beset by complicated arguments that they will have been unable to make up their minds.

In such a situation the BHA can help by encouraging informed public debate through its members, publications and groups, its courses and conferences, and it can see that legislators, people in authority and the press have the issues presented to them clearly. Speakers, often specially trained, visit societies, schools and clubs all over the country to lecture and debate about Humanism and its social implications. The demand is very great, and we always need more names for our speakers' list.



This little girl went to a religious school about the beginning of the century. So much has changed, yet does a child in such a school today have any freer choice of belief?
The BHA has consistently opposed state subsidies for church schools and campaigned in the field of the 1944 Education Act, with its provisions for compulsory religious instruction. Humanists think that indoctrination of any kind is wrong, and that to enforce it by law is outrageous. what should happen is that the child should be enabled to compare various ways of life and choose for himself, his basic moral outlook being formed by his experience of life in the school community. The BHA has been responsible for a considerable change in attitudes towards moral and religious education through running working parties of experts and concerned people, organising publicity, and briefing MPs. Courses for Religious Education teachers (on Humanism!) and public meetings have been on its list as well.

Specialist bodies

Apart from co-operating with existing bodies, the BHA sets up purely humanist ones for special purposes. There are: the Humanist Health Council (for workers in the field of Health); the Humanist Broadcasting Council, which presses for more time for the humanist point of view on radio and TV—valuable not only for humanists but for the many who have rejected the christian view of life and have nothing to put in its place; and the Education Committee, which brings together distinguished educators and practical teachers. The Humanist Teachers' Association is a professional advisory body which also helps members whose humanism leads to professional difficulties.

Evidence is often submitted to Royal Commissions and other national bodies, such as the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting, the Plowden Committee on Primary Education—and even the Archbishops' Commission on Church and State.

Social action

Hands are needed as well as brains, and the BHA is involved in social action at both local and national levels.

We do not duplicate work which can be done as well by other people with more time and money to spare—we act as a pressure group to make sure they do it. We are concerned that ordinary people should realise that one part of living a full and happy life must be a contribution to the happiness of others: through a special headquarters group we encourage members and local groups to spread the awareness of this responsibility.

From this follow practical consequences. Groups organise visiting services for hospitals and prisons, Amnesty groups and, sometimes, quite large projects. In Manchester a member organised a prisoner's guarantor scheme involving hundreds of thousands of pounds to help former white-collar workers obtain good jobs on their release; while in Edinburgh the group organised from scratch the Crescent House Centre for people who have no stable home life.



There are national projects too. The Humanist Housing Association started with a grant of £5 and a public meeting at a time when there were next to no municipal housing facilities for the old, and most private schemes were church ones, excluding non-christians. It has three London projects with an international reputation. The architect's drawing of the latest one is shown above.

The Agnostics Adoption Society, started by the BHA, is now independent. There is no law that adopted children must be put in a religious home, but most adoption societies insist on it. The AAS helps humanists who want to adopt children, and it also hopes to help unmarried mothers.

Humanists—for that matter all those who have rejected religion as a basis for living—may have to face personal problems which they cannot cope with by themselves. As a halfway house between the friend with goodwill but no know-how and the expert social service organisation with the slightly frightening image, the BHA has set up a Humanist Counselling Service. Volunteers take a special training course before they are accepted as counsellors, learning how to help people themselves or to find the service that can help them.

Keeping you in touch

The BHA arranges courses and conferences and publishes a news magazine ten times a year.

You will find that your local group arranges a programme of speakers on topics specially interesting to humanists. Nationally, there are courses on topics ranging from the arts to mental health, an annual policy-making conference and an annual general interest conference.

Humanist News, as its name implies, tells you what is going on in the movement and comments humanistically on aspects of the world at large. Occasional pamphlets are published on specific topics, and books on Humanism can be ordered from an up-to-date list kept by the BHA.

Humanist Holidays arranges holiday centres, mainly in this country, and camping holidays for young people.

Humanist groups

The BHA has a growing network of local groups covering many towns and districts of Great Britain. They are autonomous and arrange their own programmes of social and educational events and projects, but affiliation gives them the chance to influence national policy. Regional liaison officers help to coordinate activities.

For students

The BHA has a special subscription reduction for students and helps the Student Humanist Federation, which unites groups in universities, colleges and schools and young humanist groups in towns. Though very closely linked with the BHA, the SHF has its own annual conference, organises its own projects, and produces an annual magazine *Ethic* and a newsletter.

Other bodies

Our affiliations include the National Peace Council, The United Nations Association, the Howard League for Penal Reform and the National Council for Civil Liberties. Humanists do their best to help such bodies, and have often done so to good effect. We don't believe in pretending to support while really doing nothing.





International

The BHA is a foundation member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, which has consultative status with UNESCO. It has played a major part in the international Bihar project for rural development in India. It has also made special efforts to support Swaneng Hill School, the first non-racial co-educational secondary school in Botswana, which has been extremely successful and was able to start with humanist help. Above: The main classroom block. The students themselves helped with the building.

The IHEU holds an international conference once every four years, with continental meetings once every two years. It publishes a quarterly magazine *International Humanism*.

YOU are important to the BHA

We are always looking for more people with ideas and drive.

Humanists are still a minority, but a growing minority. If your outlook is a humanist one you surely want humanist ideas given recognition and used in politics, education and all walks of life. Lack of humanity, prejudice and superstition are still often found; we can best hope to improve things for ourselves and others by working together. The more members we have, the more effective we can be. By joining the BHA you are contibuting to all our activities, have the chance of taking part in them, and can suggest new projects and help to run them.

You can put forward the humanist point of view in other organisations, whether they are local government bodies or parent-teacher groups, women's organisations or political parties, making people understand that humanists are not subversive cranks, but sensible and sociable people. If you do nothing else, you can support us financially. All our activities cost money: the subscription does little more than cover the cost of the literature and services that members receive. If we are to expand and establish Humanism as a widely-known force for good in the community, we need money as well as members.

If you want to be on our files as interested in specific aspects of BHA activity, fill in the form overleaf and return it to the Secretary, BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 with your membership application. You will then be notified whenever there is activity of special interest to you. The only obligation on your part is that you ask to be taken off our list if you lose your particular interest.

All new projects are announced in *Humanist News*. Keep in touch by reading about them, and let us know what you think. We want members to play a big part in the humanist movement, and the humanist movement to make a big contribution to the happiness of people in our society.



There is no obligation to complete this form. It is included so that we know how the interests of our members lie and cater for them accordingly. If you indicate a particular interest, you do not commit yourself in any way. Tick as appropriate. If you are not a member, but wish to become one, you must fill in a membership application form as well.

I am interested in:

- Local group activities ☐
- Social action ☐
- Political action ☐
- Courses and conferences ☐
- Public speaking for Humanism ☐
- * Humanist Teachers' Association ☐
- Humanist Housing Association ☐
- *Humanist Health Council ☐
- International Humanist Movement ☐
- Agnostics Adoption Society ☐
- Humanist Holidays ☐

**For educators and workers in the field of health respectively.*

Please send me

- a membership application form ☐
- a form of bequest and codicil to a will ☐
- a form for making a covenanted donation to the Humanist Trust ☐
- a book list ☐

NAME

ADDRESS

DATE

TEAR HERE AND SEND TO THE SECRETARY, BHA, 13 PRINCE OF WALES TERRACE, LONDON W8 (01.937 2341)

BHA/1/17/3

Advisory Council of the B H A

Leo Abse, MP
Austen Albu, MP
Sir Gerald Barry
H. L. Beales
Prof J. D. Bernal, FRS
Dr Theodore Besterman
Dr Cyril Bibby
H. J. Blackham
Prof H. Bondi, FRS
Dr J. Bronowski
Brigid Brophy
Prof G. M. Carstairs
Lord Chorley, QC
Prof F. A. E. Crew, FRS
Francis Crick, FRS
R. H. S. Crossman, MP
Prof C. D. Darlington, FRS
H. L. Elvin
Prof H. J. Eysenck
Prof Raymond Firth, FBA
Allan Flanders
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Prof P. Sargant Florence, CBE
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Vanessa Redgrave
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Earl Russell, OM, FRS
Prof P. H. Nowell-Smith
Prof J. M. Tanner
Peter Ustinov
Prof C. H. Waddington, FRS
Lord Francis-Williams, CBE
Lord Willis
Prof J. Z. Young, FRS

Staff of the B H A

Michael Lines
General Secretary

Margaret Rogers
Administrative Officer

Tom Vernon
Press & Publicity Officer

Man himself, at the very least, is music, a brave theme that makes music also of its vast accompaniment, its matrix of storms and stars / When everything has to be right, something isn't / It is unreasonableness not to submit to the necessary conditions of life / It is we alone who, swayed by the audacity of our minds and the tremors of our hearts, are the sole artisans of all the wonder and romance of the world / Plunged as we are in human existence, we must take it as it comes, not too bitterly, nor too tragically, without horror and without sarcasm, without misplaced petulance or a too-exacting expectation; cheerfulness, serenity and patience, these are best—let us aim at these / What is tolerance? It is the consequence of humanity. We are all formed of frailty and error; let us pardon reciprocally each other's folly / Nothing satisfies the man who is not satisfied with little / Friendship goes dancing round the world proclaiming to us all to awake to the praises of a happy life / The life without festival is like a long road without an inn / A rich table is provided by luck, but a sufficient one by wisdom / To the stars I sold my venison, to the moon I sold my skins, I took it to the forfeit barn, it would not all go in / Character for man is destiny / Education is another sun to those who are educated / Ignorance is of a peculiar nature: once dispelled, it is impossible to re-establish it . . . though man may be *kept* ignorant, he cannot be *made* ignorant / We can act as the gardners of our impulses, and—which few people know—we may cultivate the seeds of anger, pity, vanity, or excessive brooding, and make these things fecund and productive, just as we train a beautiful plant to grow along trellis-work. We may do this with the good or bad taste of a gardener, and as it were, in the English, French, Dutch or Chinese style. We may let nature take its own course, only trimming and embellishing a little here and there; and finally . . . we may even allow the plants to spring up in accordance with their own natural growth and limitations, and fight out their battle among themselves . . . All this is at our option; but how many know that it is? / 'Peace upon earth' was said. We sing it, And pay a million priests to bring it. After two thousand years of mass We've got as far as poison gas / No construction, however broadly based, will have an absolute authority; the indomitable freedom of life to be more, to be new, to be what it has not yet entered into the heart of man as yet to conceive, must always remain standing. With that freedom, goes the modesty of reason that can lay claim only to partial knowledge, and to the ordering of a particular soul, or city, or civilisation / All is in the hands of man. Therefore wash them often / There will always be some hope as long as Humanism retains its distinctive faith that life on earth can and must be improved / perhaps we shall enter the dazzling kingdoms of a different dawn, ourselves conquering ourselves, we, the last enemy, the dove in flames like the sun and the rainbow over all / Humanism is about the world, not about humanism

Olaf Stapledon Stanislaw Lec Democritus Conrad Amiel Voltaire Epicurus Anon Heraclitus George Chapman Thomas Paine Nietzsche Thomas Hardy Santayana H J Muller Alec Craig H J Blackham

Tom Vernon